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ABSTRACT

The present research developed and validated a self-reported instrument called the "Relaxing Others Scale" (ROS), which is designed to identify individuals who possess the ability to relax others. A second part of the study involved assessing the construct validity of the ROS. Participants in the study were male and female dormitory residents, ages 18-21, at the University of Hartford (Connecticut) and the University of Connecticut. Reliability analysis showed that the ROS demonstrated good internal consistency and significant individual item-to-total-score correlations. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) revealed a significant difference between scale scores for individuals who were nominated as relaxers over individuals who were nominated as non-relaxers. Further, Pearson correlations indicated that the ROS has considerable construct validity. (Contains 10 references.) (Author/ND)

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A Scale Measuring The Ability to Relax Others

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Running Head: A SCALE MEASURING THE ABILITY TO RELAX OTHERS

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Abstract

The present research developed and validated a self-report instrument called the "Relaxing Others Scale" (ROS), which is designed to identify individuals who possess the ability to relax others. A second part of the study involved assessing the construct validity of the ROS. Reliability analysis showed that the ROS demonstrated good internal consistency (Chronbach's Alpha= .864) and significant individual item-to-total-score correlations. ANOVA revealed a significant difference between scale scores for individuals who were nominated as relaxers over individuals who were nominated as non-relaxers. Further, Pearson correlations indicated that the ROS has considerable construct validity.

A Scale Measuring The Ability to Relax Others

The effort to identify factors that contribute to the important variable called teacher effectiveness has generated many research investigations. A consistent finding in this research is the inclusion of a factor like ability to maintain a relaxed learning atmosphere (Sherard, 1981; Mosley & Smith, 1982; Jordan, 1982), or social relaxation skills (Blatt & Benz, 1993). This factor assumes notable importance upon considering two realities of the modern classroom. First, in an era when classroom success must increasingly be documented via improved student scores on standardized math and verbal competency tests, student classroom anxiety is a proven detriment to both effective learning and test performance. Further, as classes struggle to meet the needs of students with a variety of anxiety-exacerbated learning disabilities, such as attention deficit disorder, relaxation skill may become a prerequisite for quality teaching.

Partly as a result of the general trend in personality research to measure intrapersonal characteristics such as excitability, extroversion, or emotional stability, interpersonal qualities, or the consistent impact one has on others, have been largely ignored. Thus, the ability to relax others has received little attention compared to the ability to relax oneself, or in effect, to be a relaxed person. This has led to what may well be a mistaken assumption that the two qualities are one and the same, or all that is necessary to relax others is the ability to relax oneself. It should be noted that this assumption is not applied to all other personal qualities or abilities. For instance, skill at sports performance is not considered to be the same thing as the ability to promote such skill in others. Similarly, happy people do not necessarily possess the ability to spread that quality to others.

Accordingly, it is our contention that the ability to relax others may also be a consistent personal quality that is independent of one's own ability to relax. The present research represents an attempt to develop and validate a self-report instrument which is designed to identify individuals who possess the ability to relax others. This is seen as a first step towards the objective of defining a

population of teachers who possess this quality in order to learn more about their means of achieving or expressing it.

Method

Participants

Subjects were male and female dormitory residents (between the ages of 18 and 21 years), at the University of Hartford and at the University of Connecticut. Volunteers participated in exchange for experimental credit and a raffle for a $25 gift certificate. The research complied with relevant A.P.A. ethical standards (American Psychological Association, 1992).

Design and Procedure

The initial version of the "Relaxing Others Scale" (ROS), is twenty-one items in length with a Likert type 9-point response format. In part one of the validation study, a sociometric research design was employed. Subjects read a pair of one-paragraph descriptions. The first paragraph described a person who readily put others at ease, was easy to talk to, and possessed the target quality of being able to relax others. The second paragraph described the opposite, or a person who made others nervous. Subjects were then asked to nominate individuals in their immediate residential unit who best fit the descriptions in the two paragraphs. All subjects then completed the ROS. The second part of the study involved a mass testing session in which 117 undergraduates from the two universities participated. Subjects in this session filled out the ROS and 5 other published scales designed to measure a variety of related constructs for the purpose of assessing construct validity of the ROS. These included the Snyder Self-Monitoring Scale (1974), the Meharabian-Epstein empathy scale (1972), the Riggio Social Competence Scale (1986), the Interaction Anxiousness Scale (Leary, 1983) and the Self-consciousness scale (Scheier & Carver, 1985).

Results and Discussion

Reliability analysis showed that the ROS demonstrated good internal consistency (Chronbach's Alpha= .864) and individual item-to-total-score correlations ranging from .57 to .93.

The sociometric validity data were analyzed by means of a one-way ANOVA comparing scores on the ROS of those individuals who were nominated by two or more of their peers as matching the description of the relaxing person (N=74) with those individuals who were nominated as matching the opposite description (N=53), and those who were either not nominated or named only once (N=153). Results showed a significant difference $F(2, 279) = 4.18$, $p < .02$, with scale scores favoring nominated relaxers (M= 128.08) over individuals who were nominated as non-relaxers (M=119.11), and those not nominated (M=120.1). We next examined the mass testing data to determine the scale's relationship with established constructs. Pearson correlations for the 117 mass testing subjects are presented in Table 1.

These results indicate that the ROS has construct validity, since its moderate correlations with theoretically similar constructs [empathy (r=.55) and social competence (r=.63] are in the predicted direction and yet substantially lower than reliability indices for those scales. At the same time, a significant negative relationship is demonstrated as expected between ROS scores and self-rated interaction anxiety (r= -.30). The lack of significant correlations with self-consciousness (r=.17) and self-monitoring (r=.11), is a good indication that these constructs show very little overlap with that measured by the ROS.

The possibility that the ability to relax others is essentially the same as the ability to be personally relaxed, is partially addressed by considering the scale's negative correlation with the interaction anxiety measure. Though statistically reliable, a correlation of this size (r=-.30) suggests an overlap in variance between the two constructs of only 9%.

Almost everyone in the dorm study was able to identify someone who fit the definition of the relaxing person construct, only 5 subjects were dropped from the analysis for failure to nominate anyone. The finding that those most frequently nominated also receive higher scale scores suggests criterion validity, at least in terms of the ability of the ROS to identify those seen as actually having the ability to reduce others' tension. It remains to be determined whether scale scores will be able to predict possession of the skills and qualities to which competence in relaxing others should relate.

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Table 1

Pearson correlations for ROS with other Personality Measures

	Empathy	Social Competence	Self Consciousness	Self Monitoring	Interaction Anxiousness
ROS	.55	.63	.17	.11	-.30
	P <.0001	P < .0001	N.S.	N.S.	P < .006